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HEADLINE: New president starts work at College Park; Fresh from California, Mote views UMCP as school 'on the move'

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BODY:

COLLEGE PARK -- Like an eager freshman, C. D. "Dan" Mote Jr. showed up slightly early yesterday to assume the presidency of Maryland's flagship university and declared himself ready to lead it to national preeminence -- once he figures out East Coast ways.

Clad in a gray double-breasted suit, Mote, former vice chancellor at University of California, Berkeley, strolled into the white-columned Administration Building at University of Maryland, College Park about 15 minutes before he was expected for a small reception to meet members of his staff.

"It's a very exciting place to be," he said later in an interview in his wood-paneled office. "The campus is on a positive upward trend; it's on the move."

Tapped to become College Park's 27th president in large part because of his fund-raising skills, Mote said he is arranging to meet donors and potential benefactors.

He raised \$ 765 million for Berkeley during his seven years as vice chancellor in charge of fund raising and public relations. That is more than twice the \$ 350 million College Park hopes to raise in a five-year campaign scheduled to be completed by 2002.

"Fund raising is not asking for money," he said. "It's really building relationships. This campus hasn't put a lot of effort to date into building those relationships."

Mote, his wife Patsy and their cocker spaniel, Cali, flew into Baltimore-Washington International Airport around midnight Sunday. They spent Monday -- the first day of classes here -- supervising as movers unloaded their furniture and belongings in the president's house.

Mote began work yesterday with little fanfare. Students, faculty and staff have been invited to greet the Motes officially tomorrow afternoon at an ice cream social supplied by the university's dairy.

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But Mote said he took time out from moving in Monday and met a few students while walking the dog across campus.

"It's a very friendly place, a very diverse place," he said. "And a very interesting culture that I don't understand yet." A California native who has lived on the West Coast most of his life, Mote marveled at many Marylanders' sense of history and deep roots.

Mote said he has yet to sample the state's signature food, blue crabs, but he did spend part of the summer learning from afar about his new home, reading James Michener's novel, "Chesapeake," and a history of the university.

Appointed to a professorship in the engineering school, Mote said he plans to continue doing research in addition to his presidential duties. But his first priority, he said, will be to make the rounds of the 30,000-student campus and meet with faculty and staff, as well as donors.

He made it plain that he expects great things of his new academic home, which has been on a decade-long quest to earn recognition as one of the country's top public universities.

The freshman class this fall is the brightest ever, based on grades and standardized test scores, and the campus earned favorable reviews in the newly published college rankings -- though it has yet to crack the ranks of the nation's elite universities.

"One can't ever be entirely happy with the ratings," Mote said.

He said the best way to improve the academic reputation of the campus is by recruiting and retaining top faculty and students. And he said he hopes that College Park can one day stand comparison with the nation's top private as well as public universities.

Mote indicated he is steering a middle course in the political controversy over the future of Maryland's 10-year-old University System, which coordinates funding and academic offerings among 11 public campuses.

Mote's predecessor, William E. "Brit" Kirwan, left after 10 years to become president of Ohio State University, but not before complaining that Maryland's University System shortchanges the state's flagship campus.

Designated to serve on a new task force appointed by the governor and legislative leaders to study reforming or breaking up the system, Mote said he wants to ensure College Park gets its share of funding, whether it is part of a system or not.

The new president made it plain he shares his predecessor's passion for diversifying the campus, despite adverse court rulings and a political backlash against affirmative action in college admissions and financial aid.

"A diverse society is what we have, and we need to prepare people for that," he said.

Few people on campus have had a chance to meet Mote, but those who have say they're impressed.

"He seems very personable. I think that he'll fit in very well with the campus," said Jennifer Fajman, director of academic and information technical services, who turned out for yesterday's reception. "He's clearly got a lot of drive and energy."

Students, still busy sorting out their fall schedules, were vaguely aware that the new president had arrived.

"I hope he does a good job in leadership," said Kim Williams, a freshman from Forestville. In particular, Williams said, she hopes Mote can help solve the on-campus housing crunch that landed her at the Quality Inn for at least this semester. Her motel room a short walk from campus is probably nicer than a dormitory, she noted, but added, "The only

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thing that's bad about it is the distance."

"I just hope he'll do as good a job as Kirwan did," said Ryan Saltzman, a sophomore from Gaithersburg.

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GRAPHIC: COLOR PHOTO, LLOYD FOX: SUN STAFF, First day: After parking his car, C. D. "Dan" Mote Jr., new president of the University of Maryland, College Park, heads off for a reception with his staff.

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